

THE UNDOING

She didn't try to bother him while he was writing, but her simply being there would give him an excuse to interrupt his work.

So he told her he wanted her out of the house on the days when he was at the typewriter. When she asked where she should go, he said, "Go to museums."

She went to the Huntington and the Simon and the Getty and the County, to the dinosaur one, the one with cotton gins, the one with all the Indian baskets. She fed the elephant peanuts at the zoo and glued her eye to the observatory telescope, wrote letters to congressmen for The Sierra Club, sketched egrets in their eyries for the Audubon, haunted the galleries on La Cienega.

During this time her husband polished off the first two volumes of his trilogy, but one day inadvertently she dropped the name of a newly discovered asteroid, and a few days later that of a conceptualist,

and soon she was chattering about phylum chordata, art deco stemware, and the Tel Quel group.

He became so painfully aware of his inadequacies that he could no longer bring himself to demonstrate his ignorance in print.

FOUR MEN

Her first man was an aspiring writer. He was militantly unfaithful to her. He brought her children, words, sorrow. He left her.

Her second man was an aspiring musician. He was faithful for a time and then relentlessly a cad. He was good to the children. He brought her songs and sorrow. He left her.

Her next man was an aspiring painter.
He was sometimes unfaithful and often drunk.
The children loved him.
He left.

Her fourth man was a picture framer.
Although he was a schemer with the soul,
but not the tact, of a Dale Carnegie instructor,
he brought her little money.
Since he had fulfilled none of his early promise,
it was necessary to him that he continually prove,
in petty ways, his superiority to those who had.
He drove away her friends, replaced them with
his equally worthless cronies.
It was a source of irritation to him
that her children were more intelligent and charming
than himself.
His behavior towards them
kept her on the verge of losing custody.

He was faithful to her without blemish.
He did not even bring her sorrow.
In spite of the prayers of all who knew her,
her three former men by no means least of all,
it never occurred to him to leave her.

WHAT IS THE SOUND OF A SINGLE COOKIE CRUMBLING

There is no ethnicity of cuisine that I less enjoy
than that of the Chinese.
Ever since she discovered my aversion to essence of soy,
Chinese food has become my girlfriend's favorite.

At least the stuff is relatively soft,
which was just as well this particular night
because a sore left jaw
had left me barely able to chew.

So when the cookies arrived,
naturally her fortune read,
"A new romance will bring you great happiness,"
and mine, "You will talk less and listen more."